

## THE NECESSITY AND DESIGN OF BAPTISM.

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While there are indeed few people who do not administer baptism to candidates for membership among them, after some one of the prevailing modes, it must yet be admitted that there is a laxness concerning the matter, and that the indifference grows apace. We even find symptoms of it, where we least expect,—among people who have been taught that it occupies a prominent place among the ordinances of God's house. It has even been asserted that "we are born because we are human, and baptized because we are Christians," which of course may easily be construed to mean that there is no particular need of the latter performance. Thus it is declared by some honest people I suppose, that baptism is not at all necessary to the work of grace to be wrought in the human heart, nor to the salvation which we so earnestly desire and prize. The pulpit announces the heresy, and the pew is ready to take it up, until many refuse to receive it at all. Because men *think* it is not necessary they have the boldness to teach against it, regardless of what the word may have to say about it, and now and then we hear omissions purposely made because that part of the scripture happens to teach a doctrine contrary to that of the one who reads it to his people. In a former paper, I endeavored in my weakness to set forth the authority of the word of God. Every statement, and assertion made now, or in future papers, shall be based upon the belief, that the authority of the Book is absolute. It is undoubtedly the safest position to occupy, for in occupying it we cannot possibly come to harm. If this position be the true one, we have no right to teach that baptism is not necessary unless we are upheld in such teaching by the scriptures. Let the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, be our authority. It is true we can think what we will, and that our opinions may seem reasonable, but even then they are not worthy of a following unless they are true. There is one standard of truth: measure all by it, and reject the spurious.

Some one says "it is just as you believe about it." If you believe it is necessary, why then it is so to you. If you believe the contrary, then it is of no consequence to you. All this seems to be based on the text. "According to your faith be it unto you." (Matt. 9: 29,) wherein Jesus commended the faith of the blind men who sought healing at his hand. Perhaps there is no text so abused as this one, and others somewhat like it. Their common

interpretation carried to a logical conclusion, would prove that anything is right if you only believe it. White is black if you are honest in calling it so; up is down, and all sorts of isms, doctrines and crooked lives could be excused on this ground. There is another standard for the measurement of truth, than the assertions of men, and truth is truth, no matter what I may or may not believe about it. And though all men should agree to set it aside, its vitality would not be destroyed; it would live even to the end of eternity. Millions of men might be found, no doubt, who are honest in living far differently than we are taught to live by our Lord. Mohammedans are honest in their faith, but the Armenian atrocities, the polygamy and exclusiveness of its history, stamp the faith indelibly as a false one, and one which will never lead its adherents to that high standard of manhood which is the ideal of Christianity,—Jesus Christ. So baptism is not necessarily unimportant, simply because I am of that opinion.

Yet others insist that there is no virtue in it and therefore it is not necessary to receive nor administer it. Shall it be thus lightly regarded, because some finite mind has sought for its full design and has not had it made clear to him? "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?" (Heb. 12: 9.) There is design in every doctrine, ordinance and command which are given to us, and if we but earnestly and honestly seek, we shall find. And if from a lack of human comprehension, we cannot grasp in its entirety, the meaning of an ordinance, let us yet obey, and in the fullness of God's own time, the veil shall be lifted, and the uncertainty pass away, and give place to a feeling of joy and gladness. "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (I Cor. 13: 12.)

This laxness now so common, did not always exist. When Nicodemus came with anxious heart to inquire the way of life at the hands of Jesus who was well acquainted with it, Jesus told him early in his discourse that "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3: 5.) It is evident that Jesus considered baptism as being of some importance, and so informed the seeker after the truth. Not only in this instance did he speak of it; it must have been a somewhat common theme for "All men came unto him" for the rite. (John 3: 26.)

When the personal ministry of our Lord had been finished,—calvary behind him, and victory over death an established

fact, and the hour drew near when he would leave the earth to go back to the Father's house, he gathered the disciples about him, and gave them parting instructions as to their duties as his representatives. And among the duties, stress is laid upon baptism. (Matt. 28: 19; Mark 16: 16.) I am led irresistibly to the conclusion that Jesus taught its necessity, and did not relegate it to the realm of non-essentials.

"And when the day of Pentecost had fully come," bringing with it the remarkable events described in Acts 2: and the wonderful scene had drawn together the thousands of curious Jews, Peter arose in their midst and poured forth the words of truth, bringing them to a sense of their guilt, so that with one voice they cried in anguish of spirit, "Men and Brethren what shall we do?" The preacher, with tongue aflame by the mighty presence of the Holy Spirit, answered, "Repent, every one of you, and be baptized." (Acts 2: 38.) The man was not responsible for the words; he was only the willing instrument of a higher power, and through him, God announced the remedy for the sinful condition. From the language used, one would be led to believe that the Father considered baptism as one of the essential means of restoration to favor with himself.

And when, after the scenes just referred to, the truth had made many hearts glad, and the ire of the enemy had been aroused to quench the growing fire, scattering the disciples of the new faith abroad, Philip was instructed by the spirit to join himself to a certain traveling eunuch. He did so, and began at once to preach unto him Jesus. It would seem from what followed, that early in the discourse some reference must have been made to baptism, for at the first water, the believing convert to the new faith, asked that he might receive the rite at the hands of his instructor, and after his request had been granted, he went on his way rejoicing in the new hope which had been born in him. (Acts 8: 26 39.)

When the persecuting Saul had been brought to a sense of his wrong, and had asked of the Lord what he should do, he was directed to Annanias, a devout preacher of Damascus, for answer, and was informed that this man would tell him what he *must* do. (Acts 9: 6.) At the bidding of God, the preacher went to instruct the waiting penitent, and exclaimed, "Arise and be baptized." (Acts 22: 16.) This noble servant of the saving Christ had no doubt followed the leading of the Holy Spirit in making this announcement, and the earnest inquirer speedily obeyed.

And this same Paul, when he had en-